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Introduction

Aside from traditional functional analysis methods (Iwata et al., 1994), antecedent analysis is a viable means of assessing the function of behavior (Carr & Durand, 1985; Stichter et al., 2009), especially when consequence-based assessment is not ideal. In these cases, antecedent analysis, assessing any reliable precursor or covarying behaviors, and examining the environmental context in which the behavior occurs can provide the information needed to facilitate effective intervention. One method of assessing situations in which a behavior reliably occurs is antecedent analysis (Carr & Durand, 1985; Stichter et al., 2009). For example, Meyer (1999) conducted functional assessment of antecedent events, specifically looking at attention and difficulty of presented tasks as probable antecedents to target behavior. In another study, both descriptive and functional analyses were completed. Examining antecedent events suggested demand and attention as reliable antecedent events, while experimental functional analysis confirmed escape as the function (Mace & Belfiore, 1990). In these cases, antecedent analysis, assessing any reliable precursor or covarying behaviors, and examining the environmental context in which the behavior occurs can provide the information needed to facilitate effective intervention.

In the present study, the participant was fourteen- year old boy, with an Autism diagnosis exhibiting inappropriate sexual behavior. Antecedent analysis indicated two distinct topographies of sexual behavior, with distinct antecedents, and likely two distinct functions. The first behavior is masturbation to completion, while the second behavior can be operationally defined as, rubs genital area inside or outside of pants.

Method

The study took place in an Autism center over the span of three months. The participant worked one-on-one with several, male and female, ABA therapists from 11am to 6pm, daily. Each time the behaviors occurred extensive ABC (antecedent, behavior, consequence) data were collected. The data sheet used for these purposes included time of day, duration of the behavior, staff working with the individual at the time, and the room in which the behaviors occurred, in addition to antecedent and consequence information.

Examination of the ABC data revealed a high frequency of masturbation to ejaculation during a certain 15-minute block of time and that it only occurred in the bathroom located next to his classroom. On the other hand, the behavior of rubbing his genital area (inside or outside of pants) seemed to occur sporadically and only in the Daily Living Skills room, which contained a bed. Next, the data was plotted on a scatterplot, looking at time of occurrence and the staff member working with the individual for each of the behaviors. Data patterns for masturbation to ejaculation emerged in the scatterplots suggesting it was not a preference for the time of day, but rather the presence of a specific staff person. Time of day was ruled out through antecedent manipulation. The staff member that seemed to be getting the behavior, was scheduled to work with the participant at an earlier time in the day. The behavior occurred during the earlier shift as well. The only other incidence of masturbation that was not with the preferred staff, took place when the preferred staff had been taken off the participants schedule for a set period of time. The day the preferred staff was placed back on the participants schedule masturbation occurred. “Genital rubbing” behavior occurred across multiple times and all staff. Initially, the ABC data suggested that masturbation occurred with more staff, but after review of communication logs, it became apparent the staff were experiencing two different topographies of behavior. To confirm the findings, a bar graph was developed to note the possible antecedents and consequences of each behavior.

Results



Discussion

Overall, the two behaviors appear to indicate two distinct topographies of sexual behavior, with distinct antecedents, and likely two distinct functions. While the masturbation data consistently says the antecedent is a particular staff member, the “genital rubbing” behavior’s possible antecedents seem to have no correlation. Since the start of the study, the participants masturbation was reduced with antecedent-based manipulation (removal of the preferred staff member from his schedule), while the other behavior remains the focus of additional investigation. Due to the lack of back data at this time, future investigation will hopefully lead to the discovery of the antecedent of this behavior.

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